

WELLNESS THROUGH ART

By Kathleen Piché, Public Affairs Director, L.C.S.W.



Margarita (Mita) Cuaron, R.N., at Northeast Wellness Center tried for three years to get Danny Zapeda to join her painting group. Mita knew that clients like Danny sometimes have trouble verbalizing their emotions and can more easily release feelings in other ways, through painting, storytelling, walking and gardening. One client who could not grieve openly for the family member he'd lived with his entire life and lost was Danny.

Prior to attending the group, Danny was withdrawn and isolated. He was transferred to the Wellness Center in 2009 from Northeast Mental Health. His psychiatrist, Dr. Maria Aguilar, prescribed a group for him and he finally tried it.

Mita's watercolor group was the first group Danny ever attended. The group works on portraits, so Mita posted examples of what she wanted the clients to paint. "Portraits are the windows to the soul," she reasoned. Mita knew that Danny could not cry, so she asked him to paint his tears.



Danny painted a portrait of how he saw a Vietnam Veteran returning from war, with green representing the jungle and an abundance of red tears running from the eyes to the chin.

Mita said, "Through participating, Danny has reached a point in recovery where he can lend his experience to others."



He liked the watercolor group so much, Danny now attends walking, gardening, and painting groups at Northeast. "Without going to the groups, my day comes out sour," Danny said. "I feel great after the group."

Last May, as part of Mental Health Awareness month and to support Latinos building healthy communities at the California Endowment, many artworks from the Wellness Center were displayed. Danny, who'd never been an artist before Mita's group, won a special award for his portrait.



Currently, artwork from Mita's group is proudly displayed at the Chicken Boy Art Gallery, located at 5558 N. Figueroa Street in Highland Park, which is open to community projects. Amy Inouye, Los Angeles Art Director, and Artist Stuart Rapeport run the gallery which holds a special place for the landmark giant fiberglass statue of "Chicken Boy," a 22 foot Los Angeles icon that was originally perched on top of a fried chicken restaurant on north Figueroa between Fourth and Fifth Streets downtown.